

Form in the Debussy

Piano Etudes.

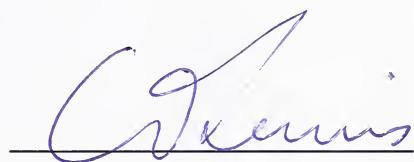
by

Tricia Edwards

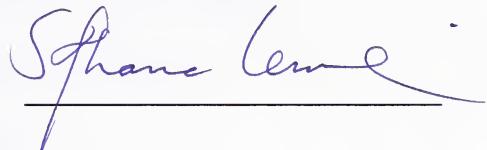
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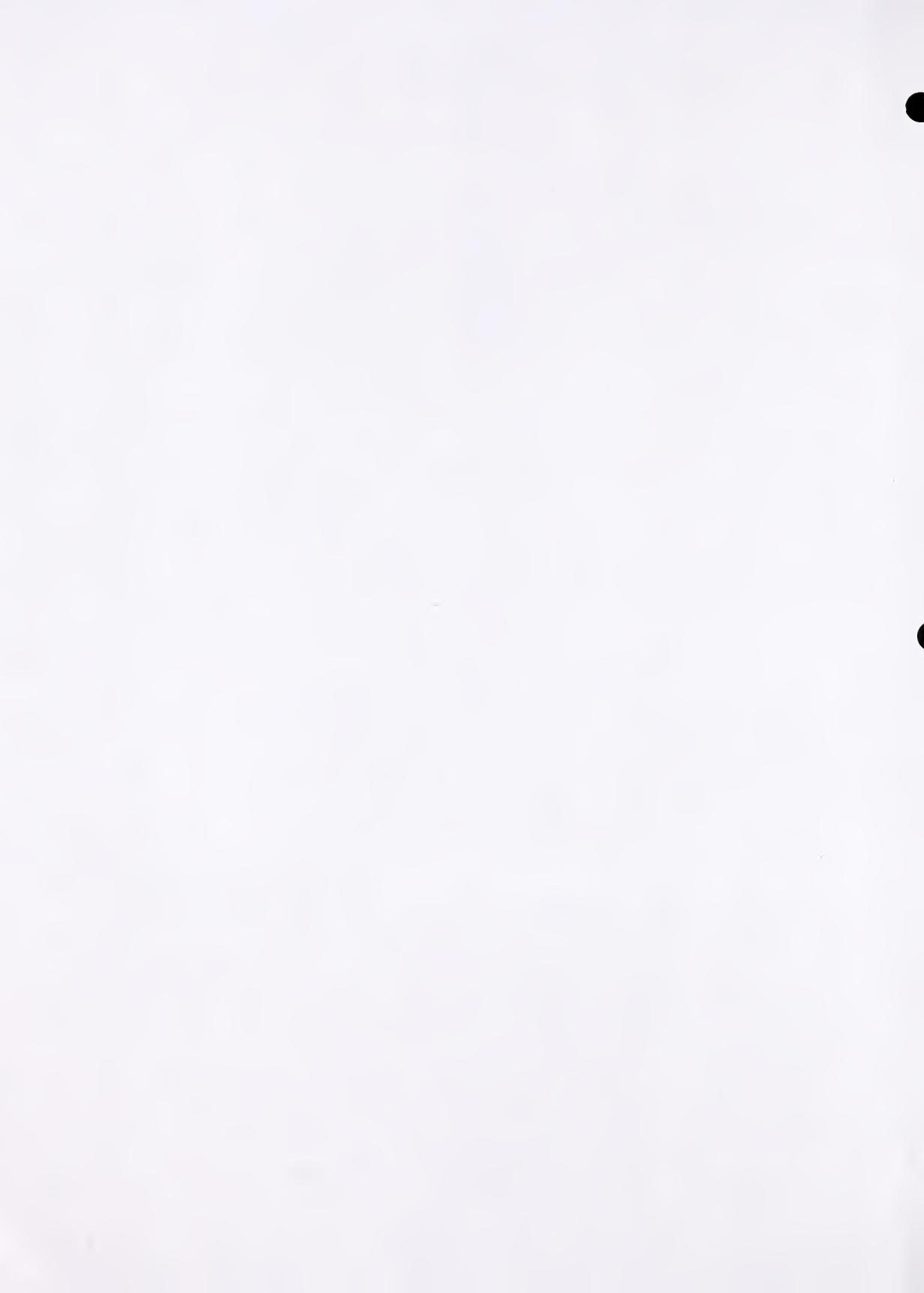
The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Department of Music for acceptance, an essay entitled "Form in the Debussy Piano Études" submitted by Tricia Edwards in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Music in Applied Music.



Supervisor



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THE UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

FORM IN THE DEBUSSY PIANO ÉTUDES

BY

TRICIA EDWARDS

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In the summer of 1915, after almost a year of depression and unproductivity brought on by the outbreak of World War I and deteriorating health, the composer Claude-Achille Debussy rediscovered his will to work, and in one intense summer spent at Pourville completed a two piano work, "En blanc et noir," two chamber sonatas, and a set of twelve piano études.

Paradoxes characterize the role of Claude Debussy in the history of music. He was born in the middle of the nineteenth century and educated at the traditionalist Paris Conservatoire, yet we consider him the first twentieth-century composer. He was not only an innovator, but also a master.¹ A composer who associated not with musicians but with poets, who founded no school to carry on his innovations, who had no desire to act as mentor to aspiring composers, and who abandoned more compositional projects than he finished,² he nonetheless had a profound influence upon the music and musicians of the rest of the century.

The compositions written at Pourville represent the end of Debussy's career. After them, the song "Noel des enfants qui n'ont plus de maisons," sketches for a choral work, and the piano and violin sonata, completed in the spring of 1917, were his last works before his death from cancer on March 25, 1918. The twelve piano études are the work of a mature composer at the close of his career, yet they also reveal Debussy, as always, seeking new ways of composing, still plagued by a fear of repeating himself.

Earlier composers had written études for the piano, and Debussy's preparation for

¹William Austin, Music in the Twentieth Century (New York: W.W. Norton, 1966), p. 1.

²Ibid.



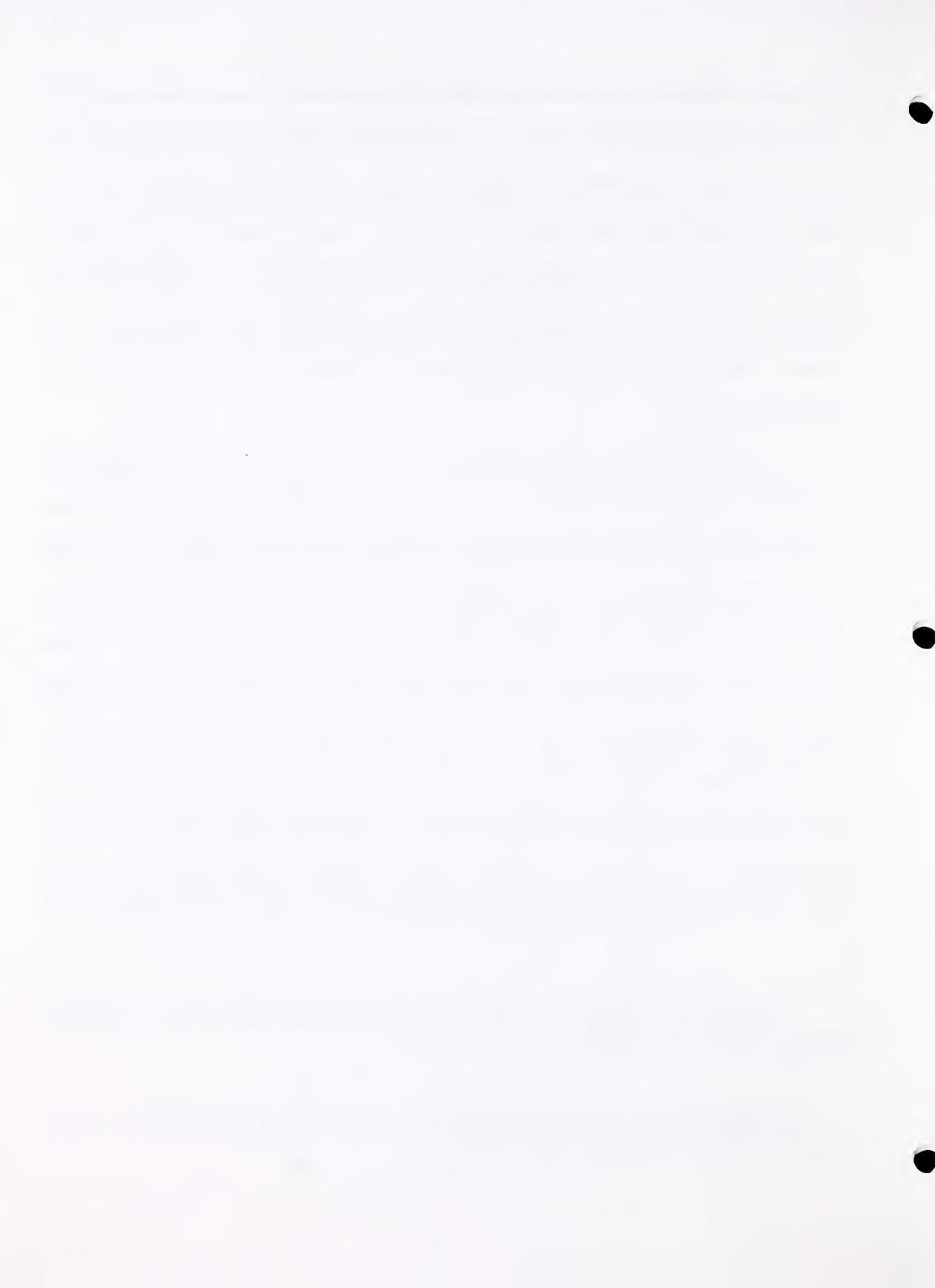
his publisher Durand of a new edition of Chopin's works may have provided inspiration.³ Austin acknowledges that the études " . . . are the least played of Debussy's piano music. But they are the best-matched set of pieces he wrote. Together their range of mood and technique is immense, and every one of them is as rich as any of the more famous earlier pieces."⁴ The set contains Debussy's contributions, albeit of a highly individual nature, to such time-honoured pianistic problems as thirds, sixths and octaves. But Debussy also set for himself new challenges in études for fourths, ornaments and opposing sonorities.

Debussy himself was proud of the set. In a letter of August, 1915 Debussy tells his publisher Durand that he had " . . . invested a lot of passion and faith in the future of the Études." He hopes they will meet with Durand's approval and goes on to say that "I'm sure you'll agree with me that there's no need to make technical exercises oversombre just to appear more serious; a little charm never spoilt anything."⁵ A month later, he wrote again to Durand upon the completion of the études: "I admit to being happy to have brought to fruition this work, which, without false vanity, will have a particular place. Beyond technique, these études will serve as an apt preparation to pianists in understanding better that one may not approach music armed solely with fierce hands! . . . Last night, at midnight, I finished copying the last note of the études. Ouff! The most intricate Japanese woodcut is child's play compared to the graphism of

³J. Schneider, "The Debussy Etudes: Challenge to Mind and Fingers," Journal of the American Liszt Society, Vol. 14, 1983, p. 59.

⁴Austin, p. 42.

⁵Debussy Letters, ed. François Lesure and Roger Nicols, trans. Roger Nichols, (London: Faber and Faber, 1987), p. 300.



some of those pages, but I am content. It is a good work.⁶

The collection divides itself into two sets of six, and while the ordering went through several changes,⁷ the two sets do exhibit distinct characteristics. The first book concerns itself with digital technical issues and includes études on five-finger patterns, thirds, fourths, sixths, octaves, and eight-finger patterns, while the second book deals with more elaborate pianistic and compositional challenges with études on chromatic scale passages, ornaments, repeated notes, opposing sonorities, compounded arpeggios, and chords.

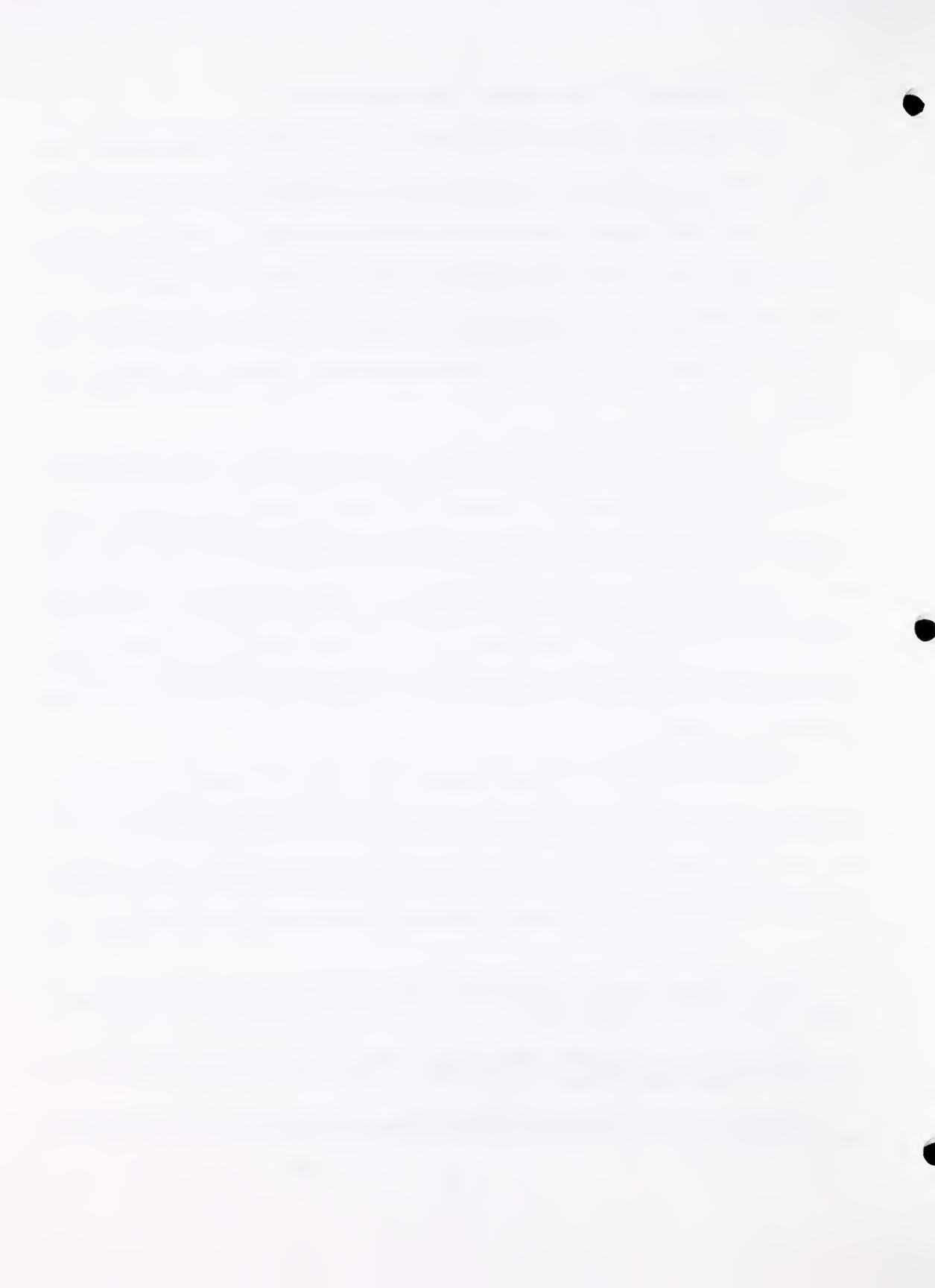
Determining the form and the methods of its construction in these works can be a daunting yet a rewarding task. Because of Debussy's innovative approach, it soon becomes clear that the tools of analysis and means of identification applied to the music of his predecessors do not accurately describe the work of Debussy.⁸ As well, the composer's own compositional technique, and with it his conception of form, evolved throughout his career, so that no one simple set of rules and principles can be developed to describe his work.

The form of each of the twelve études is unique; no one procedure directs more than one of the pieces. For the purposes of this paper, the discussion will focus on the first book of études, the six that deal with technical, digital problems. The set begins and ends with studies on scale passages, beginning with the étude "pour 'cinq doigts'" and

⁶Claude Debussy, quoted in Dean Elder, "Stewart Gordon on the Debussy Études," *Clavier*, Vol. 27, No. 5, 1988, p. 12.

⁷Robert Orledge, "Debussy's Piano Music: Some second thoughts and sources of inspiration," *The Musical Times*, Vol. 122, 1981, p. 26.

⁸Richard S. Parks, *The Music of Claude Debussy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), p. 203.



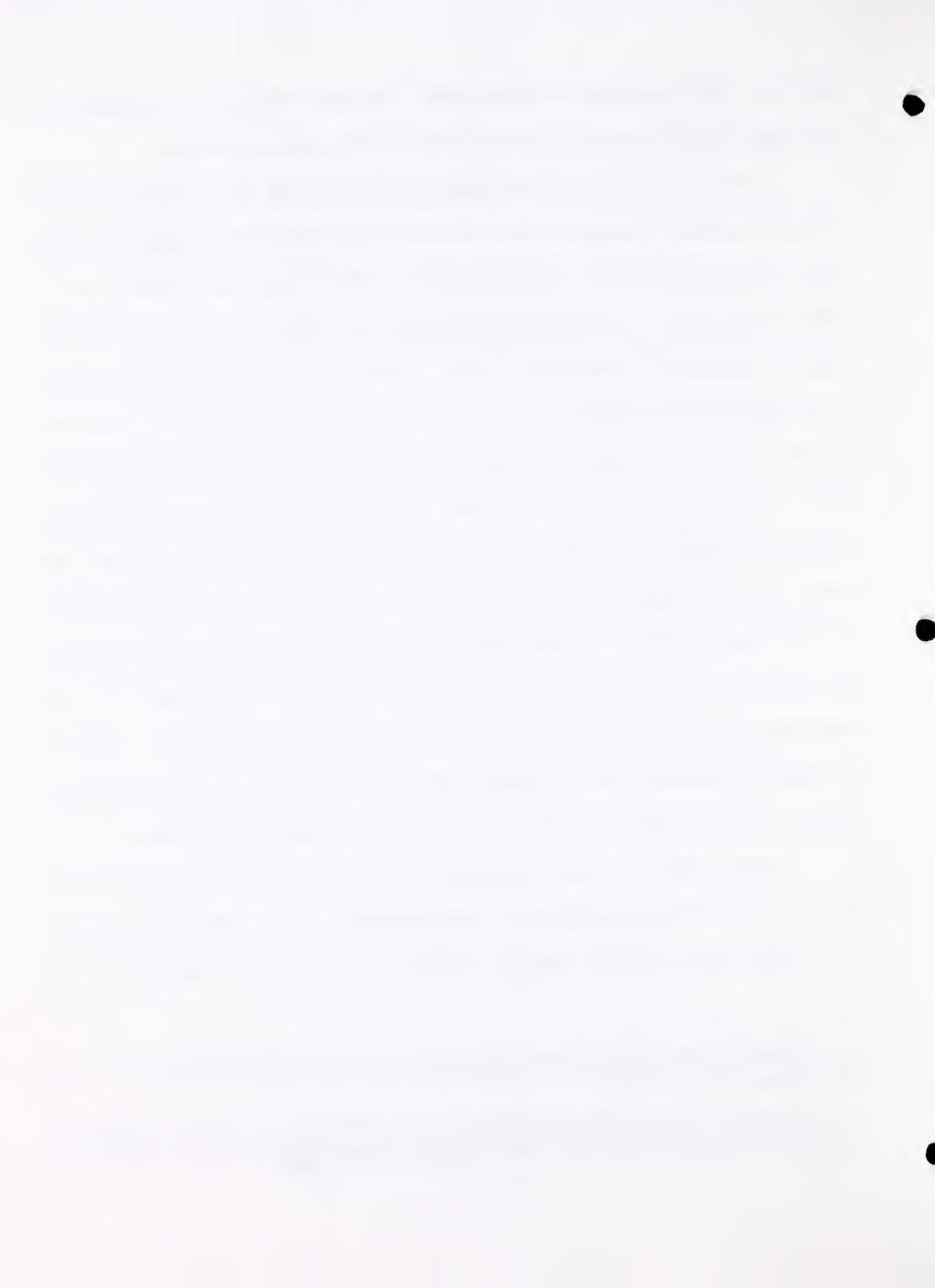
concluding with the étude "pour huit doigts." The inner four follow a progression of expanding intervals, progressing through thirds, fourths, sixtes and octaves.

In all the pieces, conventional formal procedures operate in conjunction with new, innovative methods of structuring form. One of the most important considerations in this area is the issue of tonality. As Wenk points out, "Traditional tonality defined form in terms of functional relationships,"⁹ and if tonality is no longer a governing force, other means to construct form have to be found. While there is some debate over whether or not Debussy wrote atonal music,¹⁰ and the grip of tonality on some of the six études is often tenuous, yet tonality still operates in each of the six pieces and helps define the form. In the étude "pour les 'cinq doigts,'" appropriately the first of the collection because it deals with the simplest and most basic aspect of piano technique, the five-finger pattern, the tonic is clearly C major. But the journey from the child-like opening of a five-finger exercise in C major to the bravura C major chords of the final measures is an unusual one. The piece consists of six main sections (see Appendix "A"), each being defined partly by the establishment of a new tonal centre. While C major is established by repetition and the frequent invocation of its dominant, the conflicting tonal centres of G-flat and D-flat are used to signal the beginnings of new divisions.

The first blemish on the tonal landscape occurs in the second measure of the piece when the five-finger pattern on C is interrupted by an impish A-flat which becomes increasingly insistent until the passage disintegrates into a chromatic descending line of

⁹Arthur B. Wenk, Claude Debussy and Twentieth-Century Music (Boston: G.K. Hall & Company, 1983), p. 119.

¹⁰Richard S. Parks, "Tonal Analogues as Atonal Resources and their Relationship to Form in Debussy's Chromatic Etude," Journal of Music Theory, Vol. 29, 1985, p. 33.



broken diminished seventh chords in the character of a *gigue*.¹¹ The obedient student tries again, this time beginning on the dominant, only to be interrupted by a more elaborate figure in F-sharp with the *gigue* character again taking over.

This opening section sets forth the conflicts that will direct the rest of the piece, the clash between diatonicism and chromaticism, black keys versus white keys,¹² C and G major with their semitone neighbours, D-flat and G-flat (F-sharp). These same conflicts return in the final étude, "pour les huits doigts,"¹³ where they will be resolved in a very different way.

The second section of "cinq doigts" returns to C major, even though the 6/16 *gigue* rhythm has now triumphed over the square 4/4 of the opening exercise. The section becomes tonally less stable towards its end with the E-flat--D-flat--B-(flat) line interrupting the dominant scales.

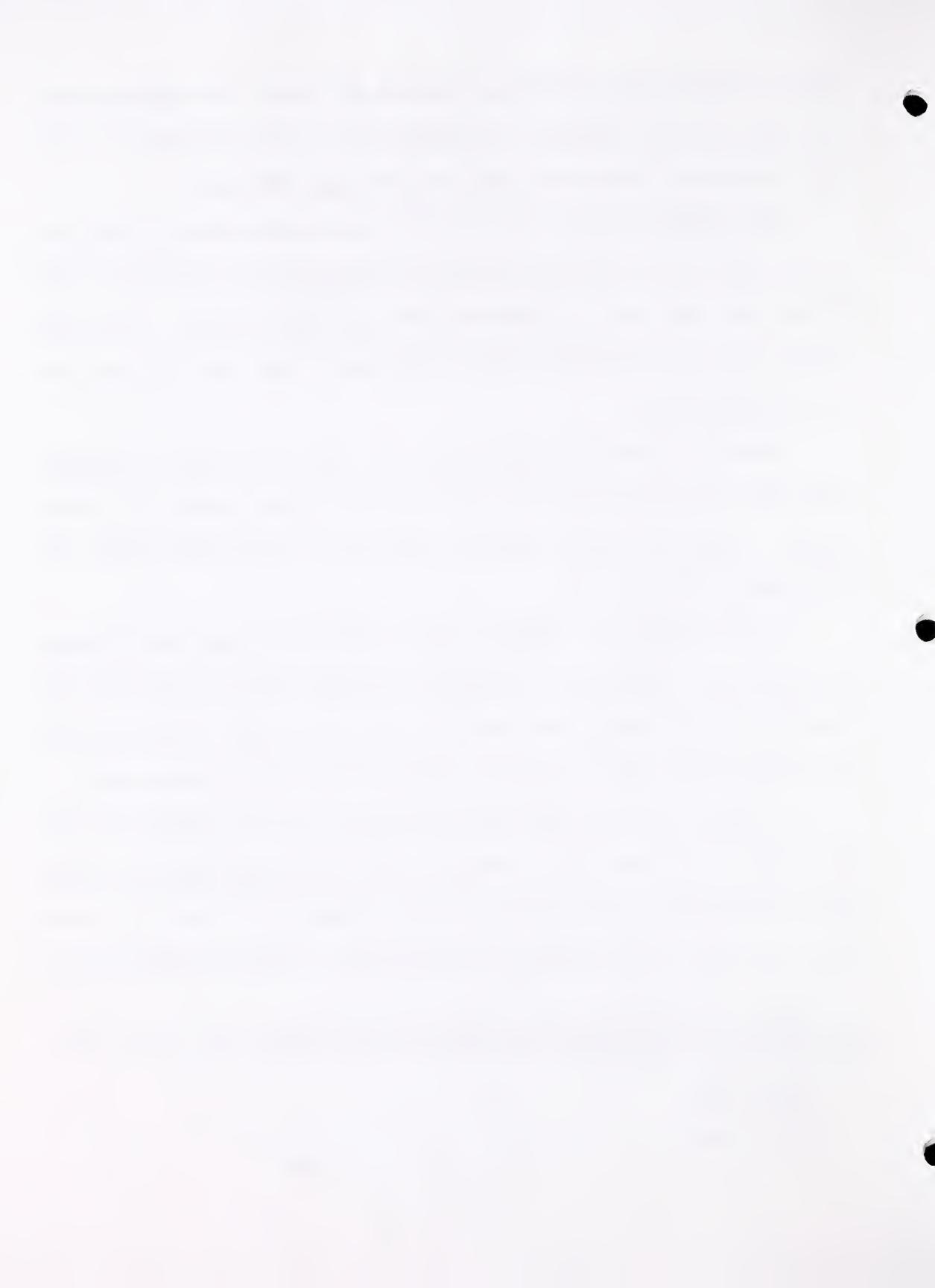
A new ostinato pattern in G-flat in the bass at measure 48 signals the beginning of something new. G-flat is then juxtaposed with the same idea in G major, white keys contrasted with black, and the remainder of the section is a pastiche of ideas from the two previous sections, again becoming less tonally certain at the end of the section.

In measure 75, a new bass ostinato in D-flat is set up, to be replaced after 10 measures by a new ostinato figure of thirty-seconds, a rhythmically diminished, tonally ambiguous echo of the original five-finger exercise. This leads into a transitional section which encapsulates the subject matter of the entire piece as quintuplets beginning on G-

¹¹Robert E. Schmitz, The Piano Works of Claude Debussy (New York: Dover Publications Inc., 1950), p. 194.

¹²Ibid., p. 195.

¹³Ibid., p. 204.



flat and D-flat--black notes--alternate with quintuplets on white notes. These ascend through three octaves in a long crescendo and accelerando to the beginning of the final section at measure 97. Here, the thirty-second figure, the diminished version of the five-finger exercise, now fortissimo and beginning on C, reflects the triumph of C major, white notes over black, diatonicism over chromaticism. There is one last interruption, a reminder that the conflict will return, in the rushing D-flat major scale that precedes the final chords.

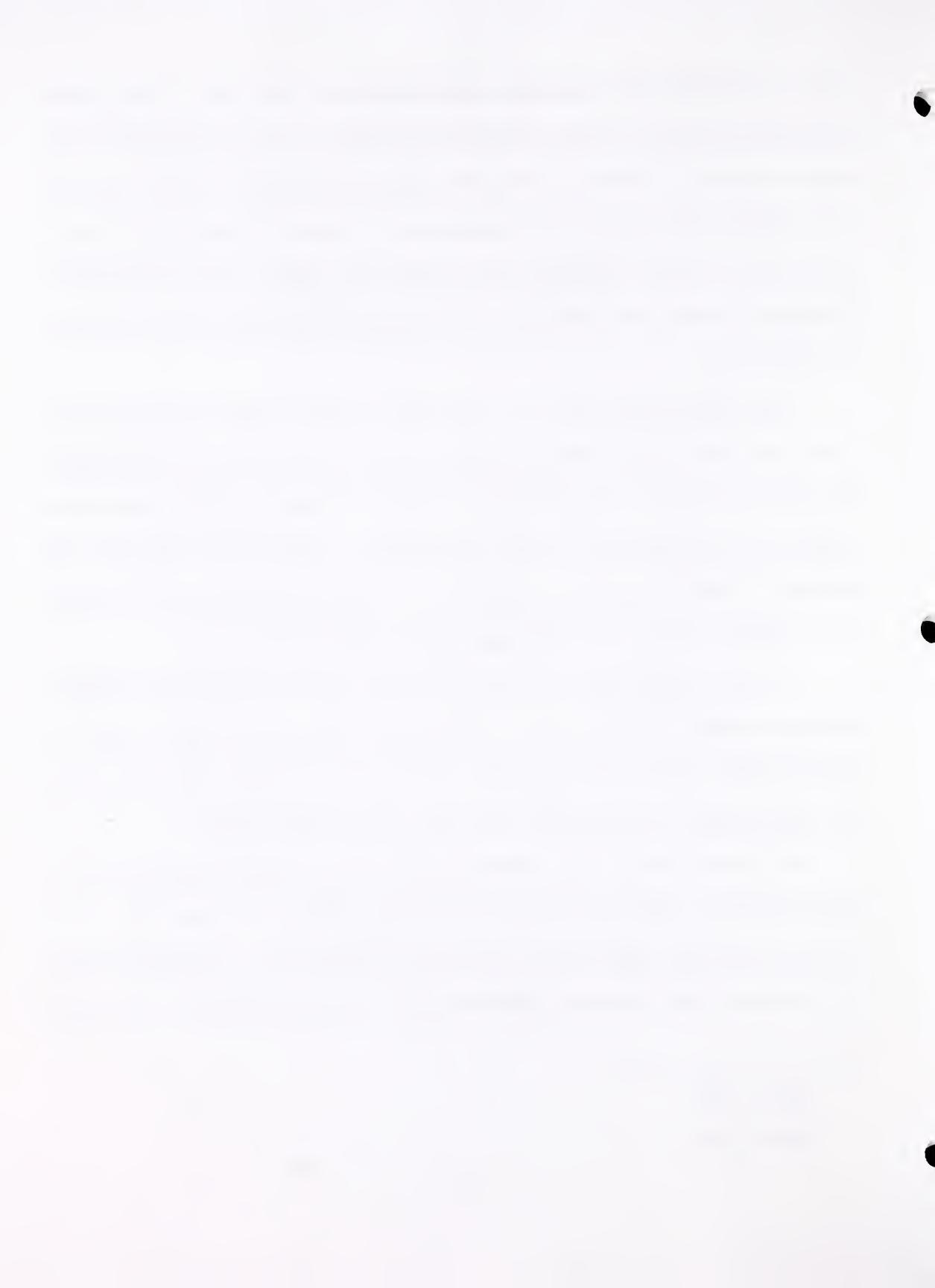
Thus, while the key of "pour les 'cinq doigts'" is clearly C major, C major does not govern the tonal structure. Rather, Debussy uses the key as a canvas on which to paint the colours of alternate and conflicting tonal centres.¹⁴ Instead of building up musical sections out of conventional harmonic progressions, a single tonal centre may be prolonged. The static quality is heightened by the use of ostinato figures. Increasing tonal instability, on the other hand, generally signals the end of a section.

A similar process occurs in "pour les Tierces," in which increasingly chromatic passages also often herald the end of a formal unit. As well, this étude and "pour les Quartes" exhibit another interesting feature in the use of conflicting tonal centres with the conflict remaining unresolved, in both cases, until the final measure.

In "pour les Tierces," the ambiguity resulting from the alternate tonal centres of D-flat and B-flat, a third apart, mirrors the technical subject of the entire piece. The opening double thirds suggest either a tonal centre of D-flat with a secondary emphasis on 6 or B-flat, with a secondary emphasis on 3.¹⁵ A melodic fragment in the tenor

¹⁴Ibid., p. 195.

¹⁵Ibid., p. 197.

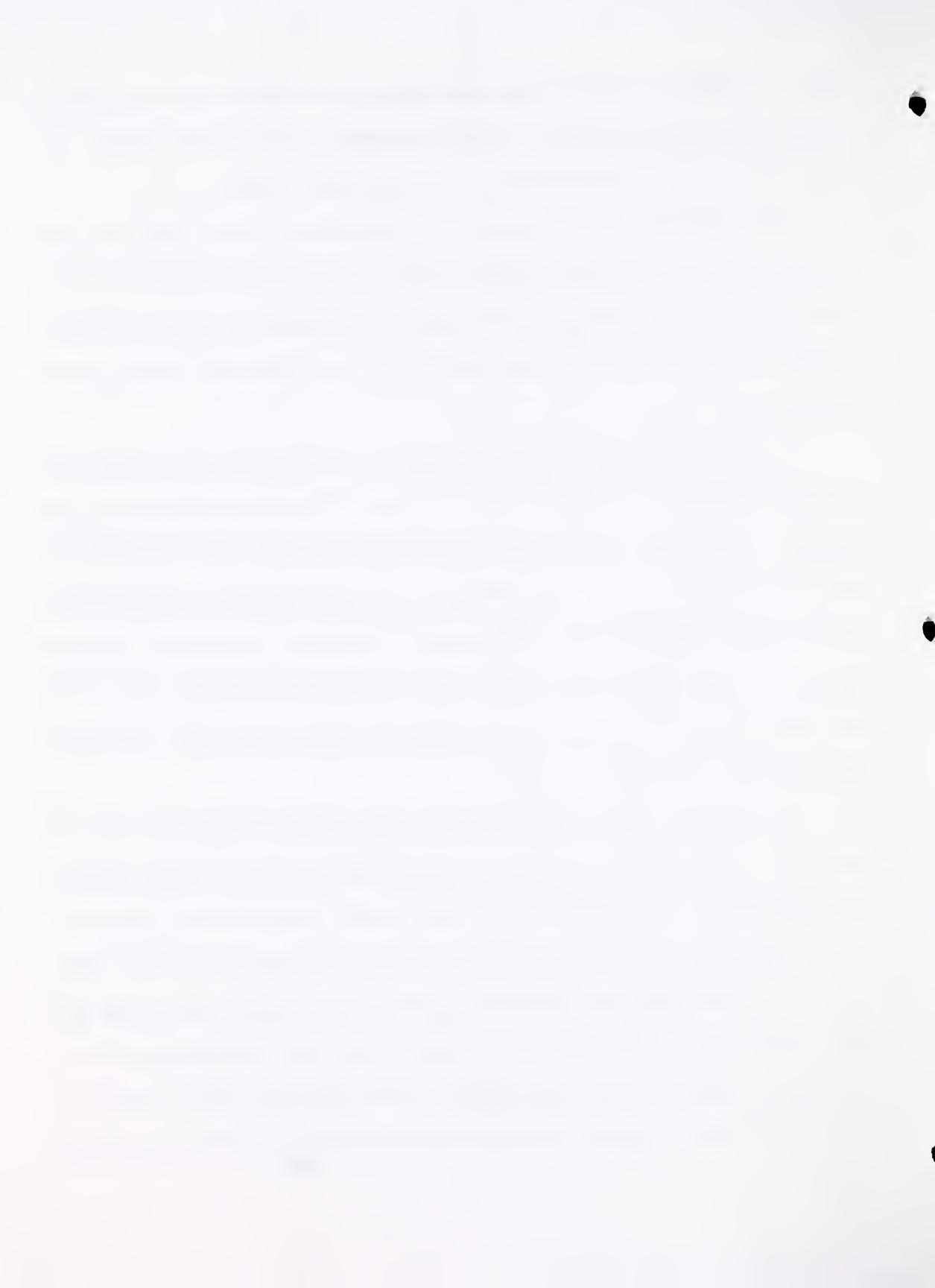


enters on A-natural, a distinctive pitch that recurs each of the four times the opening material repeats, and contributes to the tonal ambiguity as it is uncertain whether A is the flat sixth of D-flat (B double flat) or the leading tone of B-flat.

When the bass enters in measure 2, it moves from E-flat to A-flat, with the expectation that the descent will continue to D-flat. But the dominant reference remains unfulfilled for the time being; the first complete harmony heard is that of B-flat at measure 3 as the bass moves up a step, while the first clear D-flat major harmony occurs in measure 4.

In measures 8 through 12 a new tonal centre is established, again by means of a repeated dominant-tonic motion, C to F, in the bass. The double thirds in the right hand then become increasingly chromatic over the dominant pedal of C in the left hand, signalling the end of a section. This ushers in a two-measure segment radically different from anything heard previously. Declamatory in character, with carefully indicated subtleties of tempo, wide-spaced chords in the left hand and descending thirds in the right hand, this section acts cadentially by closing off the first formal unit, a function it will fulfill again at the end of the piece.

A contrasting middle section echoes the ternary structure of the entire piece on two different levels, and again tonality plays a part in defining them. The first segment, comprising measures 15 through 27, has a static quality created by the repetition of whole measures of music and by a constant B-flat pedal throughout. This section mirrors on a deeper level the tripartite structure of the entire piece, itself dividing into three distinct units. In measures 15 through 20, two basic measure-long patterns accompany in their repetition a long melody in whole notes that ascends by thirds, E-flat--G--B-flat--D--F. The arrival in measure 21 of F, the dominant of the bass pedal and



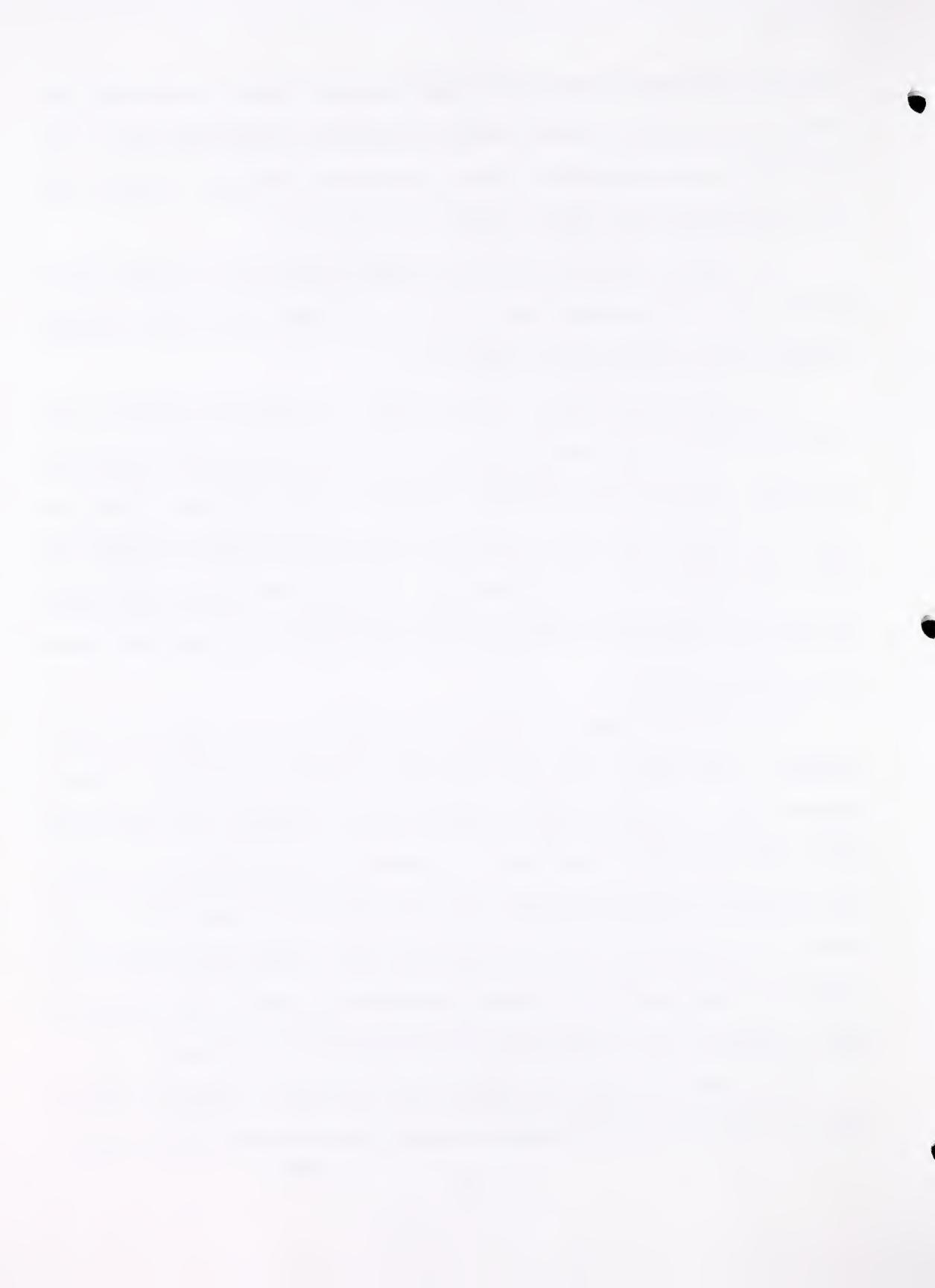
a change in the figural pattern of thirds mark the second segment, in which the static character of the section is concentrated by the oscillating, ostinato-like pattern in the double thirds and the repetitions of the bass pedal and its dominant. A return to the figural pattern of the first segment completes the ternary form.

The tripartite structure of the entire middle section follows a pattern not of repetition, but of progression, from the statis of the first unit to the increasingly chromatic, tonally unstable sections that follow.

The second section comprises measures 28-37. In measures 28 through 31, the tonal centre of E is clearly established by the ii-V-I pattern repeated three times in the bass, while a new tonal centre of D-flat is established by the same means in measures 32-33. Then the bass drops out, and a melodic line moving through thirds hearkens back to the first static section. The final section, measures 38-44, becomes increasingly chromatic and is accompanied by an ascending melodic fragment leading up to the return of the opening material.

A new left-hand melody accompanies the double thirds at measure 49 and it continues, a step higher, in the following *leggiero*, chromatic segment that parallels measures 8-12. At measure 59, the opening material is reiterated, now thicker and richer, with double thirds in both hands. A completely new idea interrupts at measure 63, an overlay of E-flat major harmony in the left hand, and in the right hand, a chord built on D, an augmented triad with a seventh made up of stacked thirds. From this is evolved an ostinato pattern of four measures that builds to the return of the declamatory idea of measures 13 and 14, which has now been expanded to ten measures.

This is the climax of the piece and the E-flat--D conflict is continued in the left hand. It is not until the final measure that Debussy finally solves the mystery of the D-

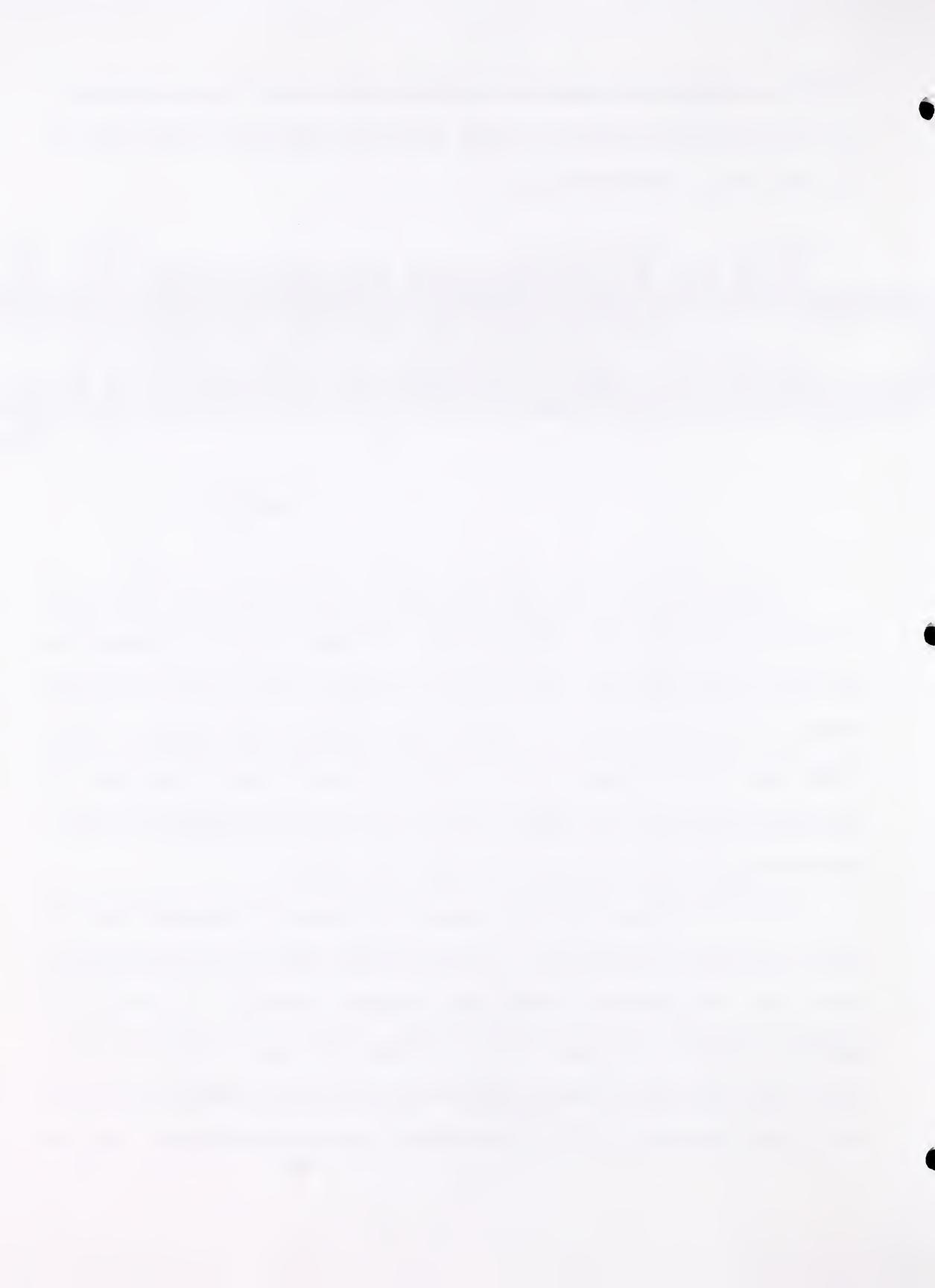


flat/B-flat ambiguity, and in spite of the reiterated A-flat chords throughout the final 10 bars and the D-flat in the bass of measure 75, the D-flat slips down to B-flat and a B-flat minor chord in the final measure.

Example 1

A similar conflict of tonal centres takes place in "pour les Quarts." The form is a combination of a two- and a three-part form. The first section ends at measure 42, the halfway mark of the piece, with the next two sections comprising the remaining 43 measures of the piece. As the first section is characterized by rapid changes and short formal units and the remaining two by longer phrases and greater continuity, the symmetrical division into two equal parts seems as important as the changes in character, mood and figuration that mark the division into three sections.

In the first section, four-to-eight measure sections contrast dramatically with one another in character and figuration. Two sections follow; these can also be considered as one unit. The tonal plan of this piece is elusive. However, the fourth C-F is significant throughout, and again the two conflicting tonal centres reflect the subject matter of the entire piece. The key signature of one flat seems to suggest a tonal centre of F, yet the piece ends on a C. The interval of a fourth is itself ambiguous: does the



C represent the dominant of the F, as appears to be most likely, or is F the subdominant of C, as the ending would suggest?

The fourth C-F figures significantly in the first half of the piece, comprised of seven generally non-repetitive segments. In the opening six measures, the line comes to rest in two places. The first, functioning as a half-cadence, occurs when the two independent lines of fourths in left and right hands move in parallel motion beginning at measure three and coming to a brief stop on the second beat. The right hand stops on the fourth C-F with the left hand following on the second half of beat three. The full cadence, in measure 5, sees the right hand closing on C-sharp-F and the left on E-flat-A with a repeated C in the middle of the fourth complex. This repetition weights the fourth in favour of C.

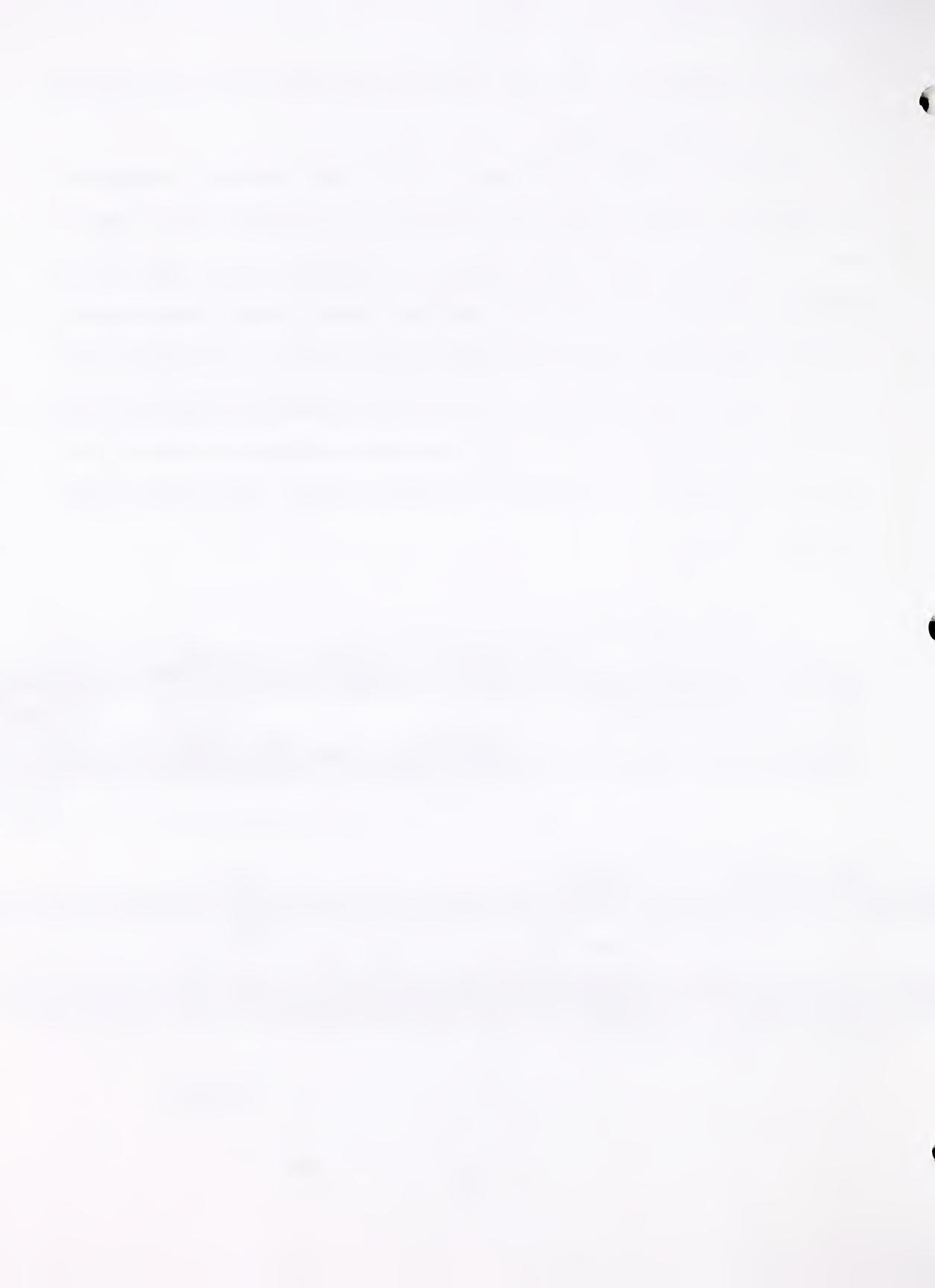
Andantino con moto

p dolce

Rit. - - - - //

più p

Example 2

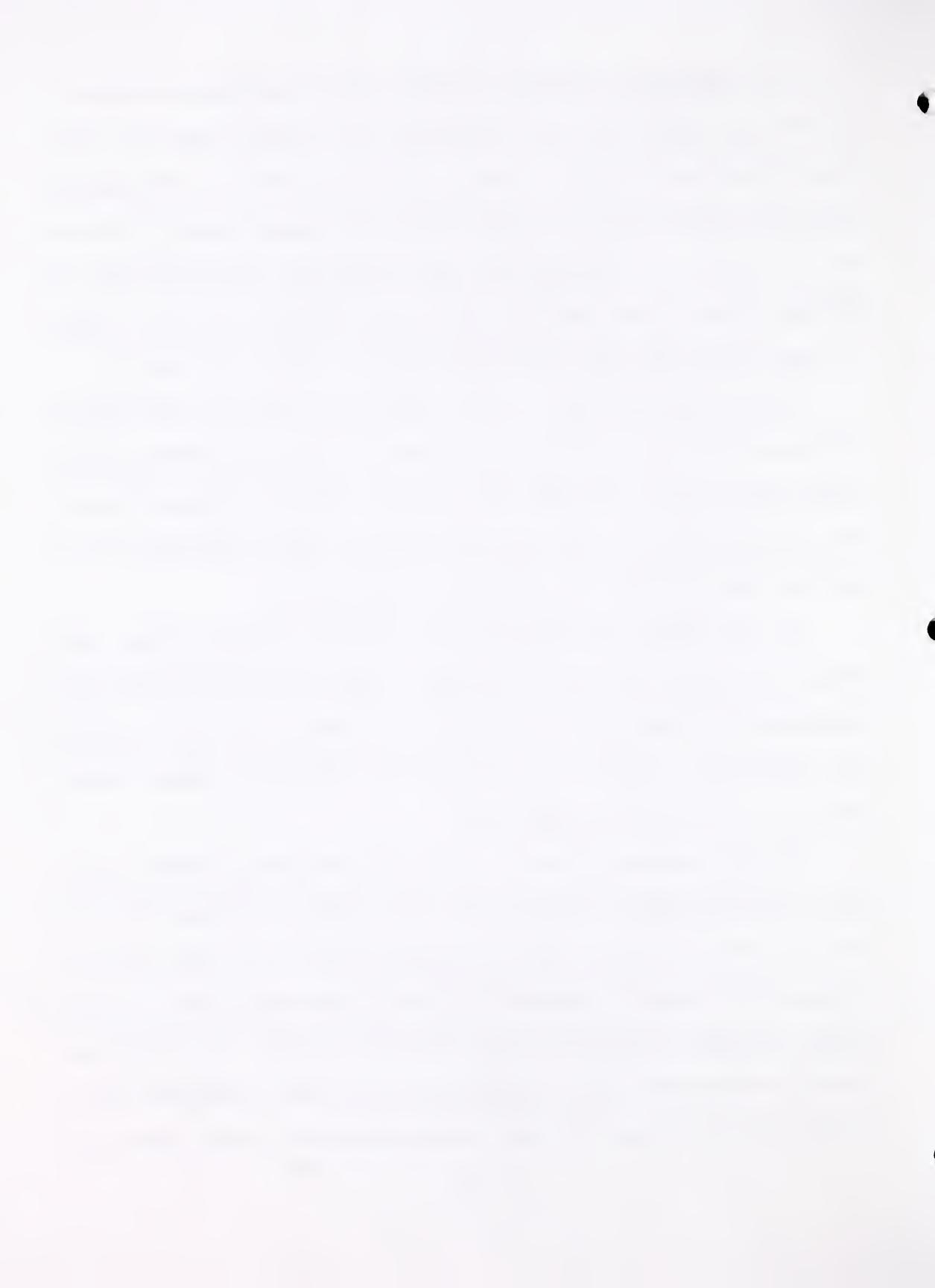


In the following six measures, the rushing, stretto fourths begin and cadence on the C-F fourth, while in the next seven measures, the left hand outlines an F major chord in the 6/4 position before resting on a three-measure trill on C. The cadential figure that closes this segment in measure 18 ends with a plagal cadence in F, but the bass slides down to C in the following measure to become a pedal point under the following segment. Against this pedal point, the right hand figures are centred around C. Again the cadential figure reappears and ends on a F triad in first inversion.

Debussy, who seems never to tire of confusing the issue, takes a new approach in measures 29-36 where he sets up the conflicting tonal centres of D-flat and C-flat. In the next six measures, the stretto idea recurs, the only time a section is repeated. The reiteration a step lower prepares the way in its final cadence at measure 41 for the new tonal centre of D-flat that characterizes the second section.

The bass remains focused on D-flat for most of the following section, which contains the build-up and climax of the piece. A bass ostinato figure D-flat--A-flat accompanies this crescendo for eleven measures. The climax at measure 61 is followed by a *subito piano* in measure 62, and against the D-flat--A-flat ostinato Debussy juxtaposes the C-F fourth in the right hand.

In the final subdued, *dolce* section, which presents fragments of melodic material from the rest of the piece, Debussy creates a chord complex of two fourths, with F on the bottom and C on the top. This chord complex comes to sound like a tonic. In measures 75-76, a reprise of measures 25-28, the C-F fourth accompanies the *tristezza* melody. Eventually, by measure 82, a new fourth complex emerges, C-F in the left hand and A-D in the right and with this combination the piece fades to nothingness; only in the final bar does Debussy add a low, staccato, pianissimo C, finally answering the



question posed by the empty fourths of the opening.

The étude "pour les huit doigts" returns to the questions posed by the opening étude. Here again we see the conflict between white and black notes, diatonicism versus chromaticism. The figuration, which divides thirty-second scale passages between left and right hands, is by its nature tonally ambiguous. The horizontal scale figurations, due to their speed and the use of the pedal, become vertical sonorities,¹⁶ which in the absence of a tonally defining bass line make this étude walk precariously close to the edge of tonality.

In spite of this, there is yet the implication of a large- scale movement from tonic to dominant and back. The middle of this three-part, ABA form centres on D-flat. In the final bars of the piece, a descending line in the left hand leads back to D-flat which is then highlighted in the remaining figural patterns to prepare for the arrival of its G-flat tonic in the final measure; G-flat is then recognized in retrospect as the tonal centre of the entire piece.

The conflict between white and black notes is expressed in a number of ways: between beats (measures 2-4), within beats (measures 7-12), as a chromatic line (measures 21-24), in melodic constructions (measures 54-59), juxtaposed in *glissandi* (measures 33-34), as well as superimposed (measures 41-41, 65-66). In spite of the arrival of a tonic in the final measure, the sense of victory is not so complete as in "pour les 'cinq doigts"'; in the progression from the simple opening of the first étude to the final étude, the tonal waters have become muddied.

Normally conventional tonality goes hand-in-hand with a phrase and cadential

¹⁶Teresa Chirico, "Gli Studi di Debussy," Nuova rivista musicale italiana, Vol. 19, 1985, p. 669.



structure that defines the points of tonal tension and release. Debussy does not use these structures. As phrases are often defined by their dissimilarity to what is around them rather than by a process of tonal tension and resolution, cadences do not fulfill their normal function. Yet points of closure, several of which have been already noted, can still be identified. They may be created by a subtle relaxation in tempo or a change in figuration; or, as in "cinq doigts" and "Tierces," the end of a section may be signalled by increasing chromaticism or a lack of tonal stability, rather than by a release of tonal tension; or, as in "Octaves" and "huit doigts," there may be no sense of closure from beginning to end: those passages that serve to close off a section also act transitionally to lead to the next.

In "cinq doigts," most of the major sectional changes are indicated by a slight change in tempo, including the *ritardando* and break at measure 48, the *mouvement-rubato* sequence of measure 71-74 and the *accelerando* that covers the transitional passage. However, the other sectional divisions, at measures 28 and 90, are signalled by changes in figuration and character.

In "Tierces," the dramatic change in dynamic, rhythm, and texture at measure 13 with the beginning of the declamatory idea signals an important structural point. Again, flexibility of tempo is involved. Debussy carefully indicates several subtle changes of tempo within each measure. On its first appearance, this section acts cadentially in that it signals the end of the first "A" section, and it fulfills the same function in its expanded form at the end of the piece, when it marks not only the end of the second "A" section, but also the climax and end of the entire piece.

In "Quartes," the role of the cadence takes on several interesting forms. Cadential-type figures are marked either by a spacing of the music, both in rhythm and



register or by the reappearance of a melodic figure that gains in significance by the fact that so little of the other musical material is repeated. In measures 5-6, 8-9, 11-12 and their counterparts in measures 38-39, 41-42, as well as in 62-64, 72-73 and the closing measures of the piece, Debussy marks the points of closure by slowing the rhythm, often even slowing the pulse, and by spreading out the texture over a wider range, contrary to the traditional concept of a cadence that instead draws elements inwards. Debussy also makes use of a cadential motive which appears in measures 17-18, 24, and 77-82, and also generates melodic material in the fourth and sixth phrase units of the first section.

"Sixtes" also creates cadential feeling by a slowing of the rhythm and pulse. A *ritardando* marks every important formal division. In the first major section of this piece, whose overall form follows the arch design ABCBA, there is a cadential closure after the first six measures, created by a falling bass line but by a rising line in the right hand, accompanied by a *ritardando* and a pause. The dominant-to-tonic motion in the left hand suggests a cadence in C. The more important cadence occurs at measures 19-20, again with C in the bass, accompanied by a *ritardando* and sustained notes in both hands. This same subdued, sustained quality marks the end of the piece, and as in measure 6, the cadence has a dominant-to-tonic motion in the bass, now in the tonic key of D-flat. A dominant pedal in the bass from measures 51 through 56 provides increasing tension until finally in measure 57, the bass moves to D-flat.

Our discussion of tonality in the études has noted both the gradual weakening of its role, and the fact that both small- and large-scale divisions have often been defined by a change in the character or tonal centre. When the tonal sense is weakened, other elements of the music must take on a form-defining role. The role of discontinuity, of the use of changes to reveal formal structure, is important in Debussy's music. A



change, or lack thereof, can define a musical unit. According to Richard Parks, Debussy "... subordinates the customary role of continuity as a means of grouping like events into coherent entities; discontinuities define formal units from without, by determining their boundaries."¹⁷ He goes on to list the musical elements that may acquire a form-defining role, including meter, tempo, thematic-motivic resources, texture, register and loudness.¹⁸ Arthur Wenk identifies another form-defining element in Debussy's music: "One of Debussy's most important contributions to twentieth-century musical thought is the emphasis on sound as a structural element."¹⁹ Large formal units in the études may be defined by a very different sound world from the surrounding material. The clearest example occurs in "pour les octaves" where in the contrasting middle section, Debussy imitates the distinctive sounds of the Javanese gamelan.²⁰ We will now look further at the use of sound as well as other musical materials conventionally subordinate to tonality and how they create form in the six études.

In "pour les Sixtes," the end of the first "A" of the overall ABCBA form is signalled by the cadential figure already noted. When "B" begins, the tempo has changed, now *Mouvement, poco agitato* from *Lento*, duplestet pulse division has been replaced by triplestet, the articulation, which has been primarily legato, is now somewhat detached, the texture of sixths in both hands changes to sixths in only the right hand with a bass line and melodic fragment in the left, and a new tonal centre of F is established.

¹⁷Parks, The Music of Claude Debussy, p. 204.

¹⁸Ibid., pp. 205-206.

¹⁹Wenk, p. 43.

²⁰Elder, p. 12.



When "C" begins, the tempo again picks up from the *ritardando* of the previous section, the dynamic is *subito piano*, the texture has again been thinned, and a new figuration is introduced by the right hand. G-flat dominates this section and, in combination with the figuration and subtle tempo changes, creates a nested ternary structure so that the section divides itself into four plus three plus four measures.

When "B" returns, there is again a change in figuration, texture, tempo and tonal centre. And when the opening material returns, the discontinuity created by the switch from triplets back to duplets, sixteenths to eighths, "poco agitato" back to "Lento" as well as the rich octaves in the left hand, signals the beginning of the final division.

In the central segment of the piece, the rapid changes in tonal centres, tempo, figuration and dynamic define and paradoxically unify this section. Debussy uses a similar technique in "cinq doigts" and "Quartes." In "cinq doigts," the juxtaposition of the staid, five-finger pattern in 4/4 and the chromatic, animated gigue idea in 6/16 delineates the first formal unit. Similarly in "Quartes," it is the swift, abrupt changes in mood and figuration that set that section apart from the rest of the piece.

In the middle sections of some of the études, Debussy creates a sound spectrum very different from that of the outer sections. In "Octaves," the bright, vivacious *valse-caprice*²¹ of the opening is a different world from the muted, percussive tones of the gamelan-influenced central section. As well, Debussy subtly varies the quality of sound throughout this section, making slight changes in the distribution of the octaves, articulation and use of the pedals.

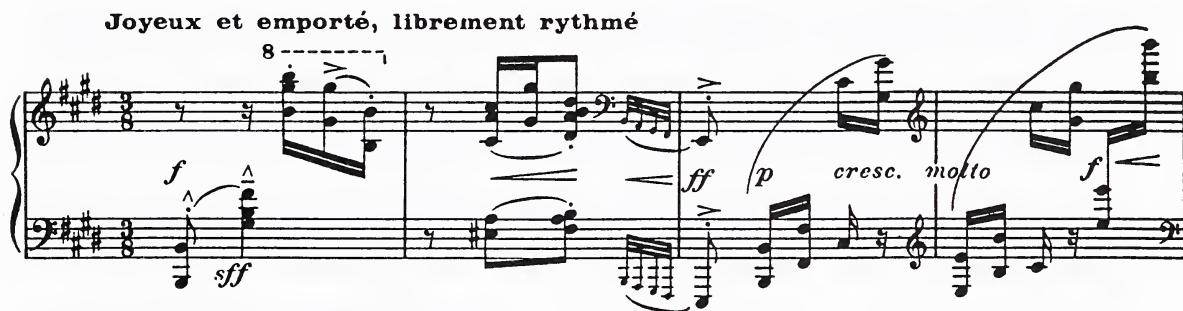
And in "huit doigts," the sudden *forte* glissandi, triplet rhythms, rapid trill figures

²¹Schneider, p. 62.

and introduction of the hands playing together rather than in conjunction, superimposing black and white notes for the first time, provides again a striking contrast to the duplet scale passages and melodic fragments of the outer sections.

Discontinuity on a small-scale can be used to define phrases, as in "pour les Octaves," which has the most regular phrase construction of any of the études. The first four measures introduce three primary motives, and the alternation between them, along with the introduction of new material, creates the phrase units.

Joyeux et emporté, librement rythmé



Example 3

In the following four measures, the right hand takes over with a new melodic idea, accompanied by the left hand of motive "a," discontinuity being created by the fact that the hands now work independently rather than in conjunction. A two measure transitional idea taken from motive "b" separates this phrase from the next new melodic idea. The appearance of a new melody, now woven within a pattern built up by the reappearance of motive "a" with its characteristic right hand figure, separates the next unit from the previous one. A *ritardando* and the use of the secondary dominant ushers in a return of the original four measure phrase which midway slips down to E-flat. The

piece than takes up the "c" motive. Pairs of measures, with contrasting measures inserted between them, build up the rest of the section. A transitional six-measure idea, which abandons octaves for an ostinato line divided between the hands leads into the central section. As has been mentioned, the central section differs greatly in sound, texture, figuration and character from the outer sections.

The second "A" again juxtaposes paired, contrasting measures, after an exact repetition of the first ten measures of the piece. The reinterpretation of the melody of measures 11-20, now with a new harmonization, accompaniment, character and tempo is followed by a four-measure phrase of two two-measure units, in each of which the second measure is treated sequentially and repeated a semitone higher. The next six-measure phrase is formed out of a two-measure descending idea contrasted with an ascending idea before the return of the descending segment. The next six measure phrase takes up the "a" motive again followed by four measures of new material and a concluding three measure unit based on the "b" motive.

Dynamic shape can work together with discontinuity to build formal units. Along with characteristic figuration, mood, tempo, and tonal centre, a particular dynamic shape can also govern and thus define a formal unit.

In "cinq doigts," for example, the fourth section is entirely *piano* or *pianissimo*, and this is part of the character of this section whereas the final section is mostly *forte* or *fortissimo*. Bridging the gap is a transitional segment whose uniqueness is created not only by its new figuration but also by the long crescendo and accelerando that span the whole unit. The piece begins *piano*, and in the brief *forte* moments of the first three sections, the quiet of the fourth, the build-up of the fifth and the triumphant arrival of the last, one can see an overall dynamic shape of a large-scale crescendo.

Both the "A" sections of "pour les Tierces" stay at the level of *piano*, thus emphasizing the structural significance of the forte declamatory idea that signals the end of each. The middle section follows a crescendo and diminuendo pattern, yet each of the three sections follows its own dynamic shape as well. The first (measures 15-27) maintains a level of piano or pianissimo throughout while the remaining two (measures 28-37 and 38-44) reach forte before falling back down to piano.

In the first section of "pour les Quarten," each phrase unit has its own distinct dynamic shape. The following large division is defined by a long crescendo while the final unit has a hushed, subdued quality throughout.

The dynamic level of "pour les Sixtes" is almost entirely *piano* or *pianissimo* with *forte* saved for two important moments. In the first section, the top of a line of sixths reaches *forte* for only one beat before a long diminuendo leads to the close of "A", thus creating a cadential feeling as the line builds up to and falls away from this point. The second dynamic peak occurs in measures 31 and 32, not only the centre of the overall arch form but also the centre of the three-part form of "C" itself.

Rapidly changing dynamic levels characterize the outer segments of "pour les Octaves," mostly loud, while a long, controlled crescendo dictates the dynamic shape of the central section. Debussy adds to the increasing excitement as the section gets louder and faster by decreasing the lengths of the phrase units as the passage progresses, from 10 to 9 to 8 to 7 measures.²²

Like "sixtes," "pour les huit doigts" operates primarily at a subdued dynamic level.

²²Roy Howat, Debussy in Proportion: A Musical Analysis (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983). Howat points out Debussy's use of this numerical scheme in measures 49 to 82 of "pour les Octaves." p. 162.

The first section, mostly *pianissimo*, crescendos quickly at its end, leading into the middle section. The middle portion begins *forte*, but a long *diminuendo* leads it back to *pianissimo* before the re-entry of "A". The long crescendo and accelerando that arrives at *fortissimo* measure 67 is also aided by the shortening of small-scale formal units. The figuration remains constant throughout the piece for long stretches, yet in the final ten measures, the figuration begins to change more rapidly, every two measures, and then finally every measure, adding to the increasing excitement and drive to the end. The final measure breaks off the *forte* with *subito piano*, wide-spaced unison G-flats. Thus, along with the establishment of tonal centres, figuration, melodic fragments, rhythm and sound, dynamic shape works to delineate the three main formal units.

Another aspect of discontinuity that contributes to the creation of form is the use of repetition and reprise, on both the large-scale and the small. As we have seen, Debussy uses ABA form in three of the six études, and while his repetition of musical material is not exact, in each case the return of the opening musical material is clearly recognizable. In both "Octaves" and "huit doigts," for example, the outer sections divide further into bipartite structures, the second halves of which are very different when the "A" sections return. The first halves, however, are identical in both cases. Similarly, in "pour les Sixtes," the material of each unit in the arch form ABCBA is immediately recognizable from the beginning of each unit.

The last two études, however, follow a non-replicative pattern of formal units, presenting difficulties in establishing continuity. In both of these pieces, repetition on the small-scale provides coherence. In "pour les 'cinq doigts,'" Debussy combines parts of ideas from the two previous sections. At measures 61-64, for example, he refers back to measures 45-47, followed by two measures of the chromatic gigue idea from the first

section, followed by a reiteration in measures 67-68 of an idea from the very beginning of the second section (measures 28-29), while the section closes with a transformation of some more material from the second section (measures 32-34 to measures 71-73.) Debussy presents these ideas out of their original order and sometimes in a slightly different guise, yet their reappearance provides a sense of continuity against which new material can be added.

A similar procedure occurs in "pour les Quartes." Although the sense of continuity is less firmly in place here, Debussy does frame the disjunct, radically changing first section with two statements of the stretto idea. And he builds up the climax of the piece out of a repeated passage stated at progressively higher pitches. As well, the cadential figure appears in several guises in the first and last sections, in its primary cadential function or to generate new melodic material.

In the closing measures of the piece, Debussy creates a backdrop of quartal chords against which he highlights fragments of what has come before. Measures 65-68 present in fragmented form the stretto idea, recognizable despite its completely new character. And the woeful melody of measures 25-28 reappears again in measures 75-76. The cadential idea recurs to close off the piece in measures 77. through 82, but it has been stretched and distorted. Debussy's directions, "*lointain*" and "*perdendo*" instruct the performer to imply a change in distance as well.

Debussy will also often build up a section by repeating measures or sets of measures. In "pour les 'cinq doigts,'" for example, he makes use of exact repetitions, as in measures 28-29, 37-38, 39-40, 65-66, or 67-68, repetitions at a different octave, as in measures 63-64, or with slight variations, as in measures 42-47 or measures 105-110 where a constant right hand pattern accompanies a descending line in the bass.

The middle section of "pour les Octaves," in which Debussy imitates the sounds of the Javanese gamelan, also uses repetition, here combined with a process of variation. A four-measure pattern stated at the outset becomes the basis for the entire section. By adding subtle variations of articulation throughout, changing the distribution of the octaves, adding registers, introducing cross-rhythms, using the original pattern to generate new, related material and varying the use of the pedals, including the use of the *una corda* while playing an accented, fortissimo passage, Debussy uses this four-measure phrase, with its repetitions and variations, to generate an entire formal unit.

Roy Howat, in his book Debussy in Proportion outlines yet another method used by Debussy in constructing form. He demonstrates how Debussy used proportional schemes based upon the Golden Section, on both the large scale and the level of detail. These structures occur primarily in works from the middle of Debussy's career, Howat acknowledging that Debussy, in his continuing search for new approaches, moved beyond applying even proportional schemes. "Some of the last works of 1915 onwards appear to carry the process of subverting proportional systems to its full conclusion, by ultimately defying their logic . . . the forms of the Sonatas and Études are less dependent on them than earlier works have been seen to be."²³

However, there are two interesting examples in the études of the use of Golden Section proportions dictating large-scale forms. The end of measure 75 in "pour les Octaves" marks the Golden Section of that entire piece, as well as the beginning of the climax of the middle section and also of the entire work, with the entry of the fortissimo octaves. And in "pour les Tierces," Debussy begins the recapitulation of the opening

²³Howat, p. 162.

material at measure 45, then interrupts it with a two measure chromatic idea before allowing it to resume at measure 48. The end of measure 47 marks the Golden Section of the piece; thus, it is possible that Debussy inserted the two bars so that the real recapitulation, rather than the false one, would coincide with the Golden Section.

The use of Golden Section proportions, number schemes, like the 10-9-8-7 sequence governing the number of measures in successive phrases in the middle section of "pour les Octaves", and symmetrical structures, like the division of "pour les Quarts" into two equal parts, are examples of non-conventional formal procedures used by Debussy in the études. Yet Debussy does not entirely abandon all common practice procedures, and tonality continues to play a role in the études. Each étude is governed clearly by a main tonal focus and formal divisions within the piece may also be defined by a particular tonal focus. Despite the absence of conventional harmonic progressions, Debussy still often relies on dominant to tonic motion to establish the tonal centre.²⁴ Or he may also use ostinato figures to create and maintain a tonal centre with the breaking-off of the figure or the establishment of a new tonal centre signalling the beginning of a new formal unit. And tonal stability, or the lack of it, often defines a musical section.

But the weakening of conventional tonality requires that other musical elements come to the fore. Formal units can be defined by a particular figuration, motivic idea, texture, tempo, or dynamic shape, and it is the change to something new that sets that unit apart. Discontinuity can create small-scale formal units, such as the phrase structures in "pour les Quarts" and "pour les Octaves" or large, as in the ABCBA form

²⁴Roy Howat, "Modes and Semitones in Debussy's Preludes and Elsewhere," Studies in Music, No. 22, 1988, p. 81.

of "pour les sixtes" and the ABA form of "pour les huit doigts." And Debussy balances the use of discontinuity, of patterns of changes that define formal units, with extensive use of repetition, repeating measures, groups of measures or entire sections. The continuity provided by the use of repetition balances the use of discontinuity.

No two of the études rely on the same combination of these different methods to create form, and looking back at the creativity and inspiration with which Debussy answered the question of form, we agree with his final analysis--"It is a good work."

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"Pour les 'cinq doigts'"

5-Part Linear Form

A B C D E F
m1-27 m28-47 m48-74 m75-89 m90-96 m97-116

"Pour les tierces"

A declamatory B A declamatory
idea m13-14 m15-44 m45-66 m67-76

^a
m15-27
^b
m28-37
^c
m38-44

"Pour les octaves"

A B C
m1-48 m49-82 m83-122

^a
m1-24 m25-48
^b
10-9-8-7
^c
m83-93 m94-122

"Pour les quartes"

A B
m1-42 m43-85

or

A B C
m1-42 m43-64 m65-85

"Pour les huit doigts"

A B C
m1-32 m33-41 m42-68

^a
m1-12 m13-32

^b
m42-53 m54-68
^c

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